

My sixties activism along with my acquired Massachusetts worldview taught me that to be successful we must work within the system. I found that projects can be entertaining and still be legitimate presentations of folklife. It's the visibility of our work at festivals, in exhibits, on tourism trails, and in public media that keeps the funds available and educates the funders—the taxpaying public—about the value of culture and tradition in our lives. The celebratory events show how we all make our place at the table.

Perhaps not everyone is as interested in texture and context as we are, but it's the "public" in public folklore that determines our occupational future. We must keep our work in the public realm and make it available for all our audiences. We might have to compromise our political correctness or stretch our disciplinary paradigms to make this happen, but negotiation is a cornerstone of our training. Compromise is an honorable tradition in itself. In this process, public folklorists can take conversations from the academy and restore them to communities.

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## **Evoking My Past**

*Lucy Long, Bowling Green State University*

Selecting one pivotal episode for describing my involvement in the multidimensional field of folklore is difficult. After considering the multitude of events that have had an impact on me, I realized that they spoke to the three aspects of folklore that attracted me to the discipline in the first place and that convinced me to continue working in the field. Those three aspects were the content, the theories and methodologies, and the people in the field. The early moments of epiphany occurred at that bastion of tradition and politics, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

My first impression of folklore was that it consisted of old Appalachian stuff—stories, music, and dulcimers. That was fine with me, since my father is from western North Carolina and I grew up with clogging, fiddle tunes, and dulcimer music. I was aware from an early age that these forms of entertainment were not considered desirable within "mainstream" culture, and I was frequently teased for my accent and my musical tastes. To discover that other people actually thought my culture worthy of study and celebration was extremely affirming. This revelation was what first attracted me to folk festivals. At later festivals, I heard audiences responding with the same jolt of recognition that they, too, have folklore in their lives. The Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife vividly demonstrated to me that folklore went beyond the stereotypes.

The first festival that I attended was around 1977. I think that it was raining that day and there was almost no audience. Still, I was enchanted with the event. I don't remember the variety of tradition being presented except for Seminole basket making, weaving, and CB radio users. The CB

stuff didn't particularly interest me, but I was fascinated that modern life could be looked at as folklore. The basket makers, on the other hand, fit my expectations about the subject matter of folklore. I was struck by the insights that were offered by the presenters. They explained what the traditions meant for these people and why they continued practicing them. While such a discussion now seems old hat, at the time it opened a door for me that was closed in other academic disciplines. I continue to think that folklore delves into significant and profound issues that are at the heart of people's lives.

These initial impressions have been reinforced many times over the years, and they continue to guide my approach to folklore. I work today in both academia and the public sector, and I find that the field has a great deal to contribute to academic and public discourse. It offers a perspective that is grounded in the realities of actual individuals and groups who live in actual times and places, and it allows for the multiple interpretations and manipulations of those realities. By addressing the aesthetic, the personal, and the social as well as the political and economic dimensions of human interactions, folklore speaks to the essence of how individuals make their lives meaningful.

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## **Battling the Tide: Folklore in Action**

*Nancy Solomon, Long Island Traditions*

Charlie Wertz, a longtime dragger fisherman I had interviewed for a maritime folklife survey in Freeport, New York, called me. He had just completed reading a draft of the village's Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan that would provide policy direction for the future. "Nancy, you've got to help us. They want to kick us out of Freeport!"

The Freeport plan called for the removal of all commercial fishing boats on its main waterfront dock, where hundreds of baymen and fishermen had traditionally docked their craft. The docking would be replaced with restaurants and condominiums. For years, canal residents—most of whom had built their homes in the preceding twenty years—had bitterly complained about the noise the fishing boats made and how the smell of fresh-caught fish was "obnoxious" and "dirty."

I quietly thought to myself: "But that's what makes Freeport different from most of the towns on Long Island. They were here first. Where will they go? I will miss them." With Charlie's call, I knew that I could no longer be an observer—I must become an advocate. I quickly called some newspaper reporters.

I also called everyone I knew to come before the village board and protest the plan. People from all walks of life came to the fishermen's defense. Several teachers who were part of our maritime folk-arts-in-education program showed up. So did many of the fishermen I had interviewed. Two days later the headlines blared, "Freeport Waterfront Plan Makes Waves."